DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 263 772 FL 015 393

AUTHOR Giauque, Gerald S.
TITLE Teacher's Pets and the Learning Process.
PUB DATE Oct 85
NOTE 8p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Classroom Communication; College Students; Higher Education; Second Language Instruction; *Student Attitudes; *Student Motivation; *Student Participation; *Teacher Student Relationship

ABSTRACT

Even college students often hesitate to appear too intellectual or participate in class very much. Some students are non-identifying students, with antipathy for teachers, and some are identifying students with a good self-concept as learners and neutral or empathetic feelings for teachers. The teacher's dilemma is to devise techniques to produce identification in students, either by acquiring characteristics so that he or she will appear similar to the students, as many young teachers do, or by providing incentives to draw students toward them. The "Natural Approach" to language instruction does not demand active participation from students, but some teachers feel this approach does not deal with some students' high affective filter. Another approach taken is a collaborative one, encouraging students to participate by means other than calling on them. One teacher's technique is to ask students to write a star on their homework if they have volunteered in class that day, and when some still resist participating, to make volunteering a privilege rather than a duty by allowing fewer answers in the course of a class than there are students. This subtle pressure to participate has been found to be effective in most cases and has improved overall classroom communication considerably. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED263772

Teacher's Pets and the Learning Process

Gerald S. Giauque

Northern Arizona University

There is, even at the university level, a real hesitancy on the part of students to appear to be too intellectual, or even for that matter to participate too much. If high school adolescents want to avoid appearing as "egg-heads" or "teacher's pets," many younger university students do too. There is a real feeling that anonymity is paradise, and that anyone who "does what the teacher wants the class to do," especially with unabashed enthusiasm, must be some kind of a traiter to the cause of student solidarity. Teachers are "they." Students are "we." A student who plays "their" game loses some status, even large amounts of status, especially if the professor is "odd," or displays no affinity for the student camp through his speech, mannerisms, dress, body language, teaching methods or other characteristics.

Does the existence of these camps affect the learning process? If students subconciously or even consciously have difficulty "playing the game" of the teacher, can they learn well? The answer to this question can be, in part, discovered by comparing the progress of "NI" (non-identifying) students with that of "I" (identifying) students. "I" students are willing to take chances socially more often than are NI students. But even more important, I-ers (identifiers) honestly want to learn more, and have a better self concept of themselves as "students" or "learners." NI-ers often have secret antipathy for authority figures while I-ers have neutral or even empathetic feelings, admiration or a desire to emulate the authority figure. While Stephen Krashen and Tracy Terrell's "National Approach" suggest that student's affective filter is in large measure a

FL015 393

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Gerald S. Giaque

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

result of teacher behavior, this may be only half the story. Both "NI" and "I" students are usually found in all classes. The teachers may indeed behave in such a way as to increase or decrease the strength of that filter and/or create a greater degree of empathy/admiration and antipathy in the class as time progresses, but ultimately, since the student himself is free to choose his own attitude, he alone controls the affective filter a great deal.

The teacher's dilemma, if he wants the class to participate, is to devise techniques that will produce in the students, "identification with the teachers." Two methods, basically, are available: The teacher may acquire characteristics which make him similar to the students (although some students will shy away from too much familiarity), or he may provide incentives to draw them toward him, i.e., promise rewards to those who do what he wants them to do.

Many younger foreign language teachers, by personal taste and "political" conviction prefer the former of the two. They dress casually; they may be students themselves (graduate students); they often use familiar forms of address reciprocally with their students (which I recently heard characterized as "child-mother talk") and they try to avoid appearing authoritarian if at all possible.

Many more experienced foreign language teachers, however, as is often the case with "stricter" parents, have a tendency to use a stricter approach fully expecting to produce thereby a superior "product." They do not hesitate to wear the "robe of authority;" they usually know exactly what they want the student to do and what they don't want him to do. There is usually a greater social distance between them and their students.

One wonders how to motivate students to use the target language in the classroom, and even more, outside the classroom. A great many foreign language teachers apparently labor under the impression that if they teach the grammar of the foreign language, the students will learn to speak it. They teach the grammar well, make no doubt about it, and their explanations are crystal clear, primarily because they are in English. Many members of our profession, no matter what their age, political convictions, experience or self concept, use this method with highly predictable results: very few of their students feel comfortable speaking or even listening to the F.L. A much smaller segment of our profession, however, is committed to teaching the students to speak and understand the F.L. Often, indeed, these teachers are younger, less conservative and more energetic than the majority in the profession. But a large group of even these, inculcated with the "Natural Approach" hesitate to demand active participation (speaking) from their students--possibly for a variety of reasons: (1) respect for the N.A. (2) fear of alienating their students (3) a personal antipathy for being "forced" to do something that lacks internal motivation. It is too early to analyze the results produced by these teachers because the N.A. has only recently become fairly widely-known in the profession. Preliminary evaluations suggest, however, that students are able and willing to speak and understand the F.L. much better than are students taught under other non-traditional approaches, even so-called "eclectic" ones.

A very small number of professors and teachers in the field do not entirely accept all the tenets of the N.A. however, and particularly the claims that (1) a high affective filter can be lowered only by lowering the student's anxiety and (2) listening, particularly long periods of

listening, must precede active oral production. These professors are generally more experienced and feel no guilt about requiring or enticing students to perform actively. They are persuaded that the N.A.'s theory which states that students will begin to speak when they want to, although theoretically tenable, does not produce results; otherwise students (and others) living in countries foreign to them would be sufficiently motivated to try to use the target language more than they usually do. These teachers have seen students "take America with them in their suitcase" on study-abroad trips, refusing to mix with native speakers, use the language as little as possible. The teachers have seen American students walk out of the classes of other "excellent" teachers--speaking, not the target language as one might expect--but English. Something is wrong. The students are <u>not</u> motivated to use the target language, probably because they feel that to do so would be extremely dangerous to their social status--they would be considered "teacher's pets" or "eggheads." It may shock many "humanistic" teachers such as Galyean and Moskowitz that some students would like to be able to try speaking the target language with other students, but fear of the disapproval of peers prevents them from doing so. Rather than face this disapproval, they simply speak in the language which is easiest for everyone. In fact because it is "easier" and/or "less stressful" or "lowers the affective filter," no one, be they teacher (authority figure) or other student (peer) requires the student to try to use the target language, especially outside the classroom or in situations where it is essential that the message be communicated. As a result, while we think we are doing the student a favor by not "forcing" him to try to use the language (and while he and his peers think the same thing) in reality, we are doing him a great disservice. On the other hand,

if we consistently and persistently require, both inside and outside of class, and encourage that students do likewise with their peers, that students make a real effort to use the target language for real communication, the students desire and willingness to comply will increase. In particular, the student must (or feels a need to) be able to say: "I'm not a good speaker of the language, but I have to try to use the language, because if I don't, the teacher will 'kill' me." Of course the teacher won't kill anyone--but the idea is that the student doesn't have to take the responsibility for trying to speak the language, whereas if there is no "pressure" from the teacher to use the language "at all times," then the student has to be responsible himself for using it--and this makes him a willing collaborator of the teacher. It's so much easier, from a student's social point of view, to be an unwilling collaborator than a willing one. But appearances can be deceiving, and once the "rules" of this social game have been established in everyone's mind, many "unwilling" collaborators will secretly begin to be willing ones. This could never have happened, however, if the teacher had not first played a "demanding" role.

Part of the social game of collaboration is volunteering. Many teachers merely call on students, naively expecting all to be equally well-prepared. In most schools that is merely pie in the sky. But by offering rewards for volunteering, many students do collaborate (i.e., volunteer), which of course makes for a more exciting classroom and higher quality learning. Personally I don't like to keep track of points and half points (for volunteering or any other similar activity), so, instead, I tell students to write a star on their homework before turning it in, if they volunteered during the class. Of course a student may be tempted to cheat with this honor system score keeping device, but surprisingly few

do--and one is generally able, after two weeks of scanning who is starring their homework and who is not, to determine if any cheating is taking place. If it is, an individual conference with the offender eliminates the problems.

It is generally nearly impossible to successfully encourage 100% of the students to participate daily. About 20% of the class will generally refuse to participate, for any of a number of reasons, which we may conveniently lump under the heading of affective filter: they may not be doing or understanding the homework; they may not conceive of themselves as speakers of the target language; they may be naturally shy and prefer not to participate on general principles; they may feel that their particular learning style does not require that they participate, etc. These reasons may all be valid to a "humanistically"-oriented F.L. teacher or to one who subscribes to the affective level theory of the N.A., but they may not be valid in the eyes of others, who feel strongly that students learn by doing as well as by hearing and watching. What can teachers in this latter group do to motivate the non-volunteering 20% of their classes to participate?

Answer #1. Nothing. The student has to be motivated from within to speak. The teacher cannot be all things to all people and some students and some teachers, although they are in the same class, do not communicate well. Teachers of such students will probably have to resign themselves to the fact that the students will have to receive lower grades, even if they do all their homework, do very well on non-oral tests and are otherwise model students. To receive a mediocre grade may be hard for some of these students too, many of whom, because they are or were "good" in high school, i.e., not trouble makers, receive(d) good grades. But learning to speak a foreign language requires a more active approach to the learning task than

does a history or a political science class. A student's grade must, in part, reflect his ability to acquire and use that active approach.

Answer #2. The teacher can make volunteering in class, not a duty, but a privilege. He can allow only a certain percentage of the members of the class to volunteer (and thus gain additional credit). If there are 20 students in the class, the teacher, knowing that some students will volunteer 3 or 4 times while others will never volunteer, will state before hand that only 15 questions will be asked and that volunteers will be taken for no more than the 15 questions. Thus, at least 5 people, those who hesitate to volunteer, will be left without points. Although this appears to be "forcing" students to "play the teacher's game," the long term results are positive as students feel pressure to accept this learning style. Attitudes change, become more positive, mental cooperation increases, and the classroom, as before, becomes more exciting and vibrant. Students who have experienced such a learning environment are appalled at the listlessness of classes taught in a more traditional mode. The affective filter, one of the centerpieces of two very popular foreign language learning/acquisition systems, is suddenly meaningless, as students walk down the halls, out of earshot of the professor, busy jabbering away in the language they are studying. If a little pressure produces all this, maybe it's worth it.